

## Unscrambling the Friendship Code: A Psychoanalytic Exploration of the Bollywood Film: “Dor”

Vishal K R<sup>1\*</sup>

### ABSTRACT

"Dor" is a hindi movie released in 2006 directed by Nagesh Kukunoor. It tells the story of two women from different backgrounds whose lives become intertwined when one seeks justice for her husband's death, and the other helps her navigate through the legal system to prevent her husband's execution. The film explores themes of friendship, resilience, and the power of determination. From this film, we aim to provide an in-depth psychoanalysis of the movie theme and the characters using Freud's theory of psychoanalysis.

**Keywords:** *Analysis, Freud's Psychoanalysis, Movie Analysis, Psychoanalysis, Review*

A school of academic thinking known as psychoanalytic film theory draws inspiration from the theories of psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. Apparatus theory, Marxist cinema theory, and Critical theory are closely related to this theory. There were two waves of the theory where 1960s and 1970s saw the first wave while 1980s and 90s saw the rise in popularity of the second wave[1]. The main goal of psychoanalytic film theory is to determine how the unconscious facilitates the viewer's interpretation of cinematic events, or how films and the cinema cause the viewer to engage in unconscious, illogical processes that make watching films enjoyable[5]. This was created in the 1970s and 1980s and linked to critical theory, which uses a psychoanalytic lens to examine films[3]. The subject of the "gaze" that the text constructs is designated as the viewer. The subject's object of desire is what is depicted on screen, or mise en scene. The protagonist serves as the subject or viewer's primary point of identification[2]. According to the notion, even though a film appears to provide the subject or viewer with a sense of completion, this is always a delusion because films are only representations of reality. Film analysis involves the critical examination and interpretation of various elements of a film such as plot, characters, themes, cinematography, sound design and editing[5]. It aims to unlock deeper meanings, symbolism and messages conveyed by the creators, as well as appreciate the technical and artistic aspects of the production[8]. Film analysis can be approached from a variety of perspectives, including cultural, historical, psychological, and genre-specific perspectives that provide insight into the impact and meaning of the film within its context[6]. This review is focused on providing the psychological analysis of the hindi movie “Dor”, released in 2006.

<sup>1</sup>MBBS Student, Dr. Chandramma Dayananda Sagar Institute of Medical Education and Research, Devarakagalahalli, Harohalli, Karnataka, India

\*Corresponding Author

Received: March 09, 2024; Revision Received: April 27, 2024; Accepted: May 01, 2024

## METHODOLOGY

The film was selected from YouTube and was screened on a laptop and an in-depth analysis of characters and the significance of the theme of contrast and the title were discussed at the end of screening.

### *Character Analysis*

**Zeenat** - Zeenat, an independent, self-reliant person, not ready to accept defeat at any circumstance. She is shown in the beginning of the film trying to hammer a nail while climbing, a tougher job usually done by males, whilst her boyfriend Aamir tries to woo her into marriage, she asks, does he trust others' word more than her, indicating her independent thinking pattern and lives by her own terms. This comes before a day he leaves India for Saudi for work. She goes by her id (self-driven impulse), but listens to others in 2 instances - the imam of the local mosque and the thief. She knew about Aamir's insecurity, yet decided to get married to him out of love. She promises to Aamir that she will not shed tears until his return, even though she hears the news of Aamir's execution verdict, incidence of losing her bag with that forgiveness letter, when she was alone and threatened by strange men approach or even when she was humiliated at Meera's house by her brother-in-law, who on using foul language, was only berated. She cried in the end, not thinking of her husband, but rather of losing the precious friendship bond with Meera. Hence, her departing letter stated that she didn't leave empty-handed, but that their friendship doesn't matter even if Meera ended it. She tried to live by her instinct, exploring freedom and preaching Meera about not considering freedom as fault-keeping widowhood as an excuse. She was manipulative in the beginning of befriending Meera on the pretext of getting her signature on the pardon letter, but later forgets it and actually enjoyed Meera's company. She was concerned about Meera's well-being by enquiring about her late arrival at home. She is a firm believer in fate and on losing Meera's trust, she threw the pardon letter outside the temple accepting the fate and moving on. She lends her hand to Meera indicating she still has feelings for Meera and cherishes her new relationship along with relief of her husband's release. She is an accepting type, for when Shreyas confessed his feeling of love towards her, an already married woman, she didn't berate him nor avoid him, rather accepted it with a smile and said it's not wrong to confess. She is a self-independent woman, shown by her way of not accepting money from her in-laws in spite of having a right, unlike Meera, whose husband's money is taken away by her brother-in-law and only a single note remains, that too taken away by the uncle for a phone call to her husband in return. She was concerned about her in-laws and suggested they hire a maid servant to take care of the house chores. She was portrayed as not empathizing when Meera explained her ordeal and Zeenat defended her stance by saying she suffered too, later part she begins to understand Meera's situation and begins to empathize for her.

**Aamir** - Zeenat's boyfriend turned husband leaves India for Saudi Arabia in search of work. His insecure behavior is portrayed in the way where he loved Zeenat for 2 years and did not marry her under the pretext of parental acceptance, but somehow gathers courage to go against his parents and marry Zeenat the day before he leaves for work. He goes on to blame his parents and shows a do-not-care attitude - which highlights insecurity as he couldn't stand up against his parents all these years and believes Zeenat is strong and is capable of taking care of his parents. He did not invite anyone for his wedding, indicating a sudden plan as he is not present to face the later consequence of stifling between him and his parents.

**Meera** - Accepts fate (when father-in-law spoke to the contractor to give Meera's hand in marriage to the latter for the sake of haveli, she accepted it as her fate and didn't fight against it.) resilient, didn't want to rely on anyone for help, but took Zeenat's hand in the end when

## Unscrambling the Friendship Code: A Psychoanalytic Exploration of the Bollywood Film: "Dor"

someone's offering her help. Wanted to take revenge, but had a change of heart. Believed in the scripture saying an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Wanted to enjoy freedom, but couldn't as she grew up in an orthodox family. She was being herself in front of her husband and Zeenat, but as soon as she got down the stairs, had to put on her veil and keep standing as long as her father-in-law was there. She used to dance for a song, the last time she danced was in front of her husband, now feeling sad because she felt guilty on rejoicing to the song while it's only been 2 months since her husband's passing, Saree symbolized freedom and she wanted to give to Zeenat to wear it while meeting her husband. She became outspoken in the end, drawing boundaries with her father-in-law by telling him to not hold her hand. Not very religious, but visited temple after widowhood to escape from home. She keeps referring to the relationships as "Dor", signifying hope to unite despite having a turbulent time.

**Shankar** - Husband of Meera. Was brought up in an orthodox family, but was different from his parents where he gave his wife her freedom where she could dance in front of him without her covering her face with a veil. It shows that children need not grow up like their parents, and can be different. They couldn't embrace each other while leaving unlike Aamir and Zeenat who could express their emotions. He is more towards women empowerment where he adopts a girl child and sponsors her education, not the thing usually seen in orthodox family where women are only seen as maid servants and need to get married rather than studying.

**Grandmother** - Paternal grandmother of Shankar, was initially jealous of Meera due to constant attention she seeks from her husband and father in law, while the granny is sad for living life as a widow, showing her passive aggression. Became more empathizing when Meera became a widow. She was the one who advised Meera to leave the house at once to forgive Aamir. She was the one who released Meera from the clutches of the dark side of orthodox tradition, serving as the mirror that reflects her future and was the key to her freedom.

**Behrupiya/Thief** - Role played by Shreyas, talented in mimicry and is intelligent as he identifies the village from photo accurately. He steals only for livelihood and not with an intent to cheat or deceive as he quotes he's from the lineage of thieves. Once realizing the contents of the bag, returned to Zeenat and even came to her rescue dressing up as a policeman. He helps Zeenat to overcome her id and act rationally. He waves the flag for train departure indicating friendship travels along, no matter how many differences one has to face in a relationship. He had no intention of running away, as he had the guts to return to masterji, from whom he stole and was forgiven. He questioned id actions of Zeenat and kept her sober. These show do not judge a book by its cover as the thief later became her savior. On departure, he didn't express grief, rather he danced and got into the tractor.

**Shankar's parents** - Portrayed as a typical patriarchal family where the women are expected to cover themselves in veil in front of male members and cannot be seated in front of them, had to stand away from them. The father was initially praising Meera, not out of concern, but for sake of money as he tells that his son is "worthy" because of Meera and not happy, indicating his love for wealth more than his son. The mother, however, was harsh to her from the beginning and upon death of the sole breadwinner of the house, the father in law too begins to berate Meera and blame her for all the misfortune. He cares more about the wealth as he tells Chopra that if his son had died just the next month, he would've had enough money. The father character stooped down to such a level when it was shown that he was ready to give his daughter in law in exchange for the haveli to the contractor, not a marriage. They were narcissistic, as they considered themselves to be superior to their daughter in law, later when Meera drew her firm boundary, they stopped to interfere.

## Unscrambling the Friendship Code: A Psychoanalytic Exploration of the Bollywood Film: "Dor"

**Chopra** - The local factory owner who has immense respect in the village, but isn't of a good character as he asks for Meera in exchange for the loan owed by that family. Shows the theme of Do not judge a book by its cover.

### *The concept of Dor/String:*

- Dor/String symbolize connection between contrast characters. The straight forward tough Zeenat tied to naive soft Meera by bond of friendship. The pilot scene featuring lush greenery of Himachal Pradesh and the Arid desert sands of Rajasthan are connected by the protagonist.
- Zeenat, a tough lady is shown in a calm, lush greenery background while the calm, naive Meera is shown in a tough arid background of desert connected by the string of friendship as Meera keeps referring to her relationships as "Dor".

### *Theme of Contrast:*

The movie displays a theme of contrast between the location and the character associated - Meera, a soft and gentle character from arid rough deserts of Rajasthan while the tough Zeenat from gentle, lush environment of Himachal Pradesh. Both of their husbands send their money to their spouses, Meera is unable to make a decision and hands it okay to her brother in law while Zeenat is conscious of her decision and wants to be self-reliant with her own income and gives the money to her parents in law. Love and acceptance is seen in Zeenat's family while it's shown in Meera's household only based on the income earned by Shankar. Contrast is also seen among Shankar and his brother, while the former is respectful towards women, supporting a girl child, allowing Meera to express herself freely, the latter is disrespectful and insults Zeenat by calling her with a bad word, although both were raised in the same family. The saying of "Do not judge a book by its cover" is portrayed between Shreyas and Chopra where the former was portrayed a thief having a benevolent nature while the latter commanded immense respect in the village, having a downtrodden character of taking a widow for clearing debt. This pilot analysis was done on a part of movie-analysis concept taught in psychiatry. More in-depth analysis may be required and similar concepts can be applied to various other films as well.

## **DISCUSSION**

Psychoanalysis was developed in 19th century Vienna and caused a significant change in thinking about feelings and emotions and entered the common parlance. Psychoanalysis provides insight into individual growth and development and defense mechanisms are used to suppress anxiety and stress. Representation of psychoanalysis in modern Indian cinema is rare[9]. Through this film, we illustrate the relationship between men and women and the interaction between mothers and sons in the Indian context. The role of friends as mother figures and the role of tradition and modernity in relation to gender are discussed. These films represent emerging India and its relationship with modern and traditional values. Psychoanalytic film theory is a type of approach that incorporates aspects of Sigmund Freud's concepts such as the pleasure-pain principle, the Oedipus complex, the defense mechanism, and others. He was a well-known Austrian neurologist and also the founder of psychoanalysis, which studies why people behave in certain ways. In 1923, he published the book "Ego and Id", which talked about the nuances of id, "ego" and "superego". The Id relates to instincts, the Me to the reality principle, and the Superego to morality. In 1900, The Interpretation of Dreams was published. Here he analyzed dreams and gave his own explanation of why we see certain types of dreams[10]. Despite Freud's distaste for film and especially Hollywood, psychoanalytic themes became staples of popular films, especially when the sound era began in the late 1920s. Hollywood films incorporated psychoanalytic ideas and principles into a

variety of narrative forms, but in the 1930s and 1940s two genres were prominent in the explicit depiction of psychoanalytic therapists and treatments: psychological melodrama (sometimes described critically, often derided as feminine films. and psychological thrillers (often called "horror"). In the 1960s, Hollywood tried more seriously on the sciences of "psychology" (psychiatry, psychoanalysis, psychology) and again looked to the "father" source material for psychoanalysis.

### CONCLUSION

Psychoanalytic theory is a part of therapeutic techniques originating from the works of Sigmund Freud. He developed psychoanalytic theory and coined the term "psychoanalysis" in 1896. The theory includes the idea that all people have unconscious thoughts, memories, feelings, desires and that therapy should be used to access the repressed feelings and experiences of the mind. In this film, the unconscious behavior of Meera is awakened by her friendship with Zeenat and at the same time, contradicts Freud's theory of rigid pattern formation in childhood which is extremely difficult to break in adulthood as in the movie, Meera initially feels guilty for dancing after her husband's death, but on Zeenat's constant motivation and advise, she started to change her behavior pattern, being more friendly and open and even goes to the extent of standing up against her parents in law, which was unthinkable to her in the past. The theory of id-ego-superego is highlighted in the film where Zeenat is shown to act on her id, that is an impulse without any careful thoughts, challenged by the Imam and Behrupiya who made her to take decisions based on ego - a balance between impulse(id) and superego (governing principles). Meera was often shown to be controlled by her superego and was suppressing her desires and emotion, which was later revealed to Zeenat and Shankar's paternal grandmother. This is a pilot analysis and more plots are needed for a clearer analysis and in-depth discussion.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Films from the Couch. Film Theory and Psychoanalysis, January 2008- Pedro Sangro Colón, Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca
- [2] Heath S. Film and system: Terms of analysis. I. Screen. 1975; 16(1): 7-77
- [3] Heath S. Film and system: Terms of analysis. II. Screen. 1975; 16(2): 91-113.
- [4] Lacan, J. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.; 1988.
- [5] Metz, Ch. The Imaginary Signifier Psychoanalysis and the Cinema, Bloomington: Indiana University Press; 1982.
- [6] Penley C, editor. Feminism and Film Theory. New York: Routledge; 1988.
- [7] Kuhn, A. Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul; 1982.
- [8] Mulvey, L. Visual and Other Pleasures. Bloomington: Indiana University Press; 1989.
- [9] Freud on Film: Psychoanalysis and Cinema. (n.d.). National Science and Media Museum. <https://www.scienceandmediamuseum.org.uk/objects-and-stories/freud-movies-psychoanalysis>
- [10] Archana Jairam. (2020, June 27). Psychoanalytic film theory is a type of approach which includes aspects of Sigmund Freud's concepts such as Pleasure pain principal, Oedipus complex, Defense mechanism and others. He was a well-known Austrian neurologist and also the founder of psychoanalysis, which deals about why a person behaves. LinkedIn.com. [https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/psychoanalytic-film-theory-teaspoon-archana-jairam?utm\\_source=share&utm\\_medium=member\\_android&utm\\_campaign=share\\_via](https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/psychoanalytic-film-theory-teaspoon-archana-jairam?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_android&utm_campaign=share_via)

## Unscrambling the Friendship Code: A Psychoanalytic Exploration of the Bollywood Film: “Dor”

[11] Dor movie Analysis (YouTube video) <https://youtu.be/xubtJ-41Jiw?si=jcn-RKZ2nNxdKF1Q>

### ***Acknowledgment***

I'd like to thank Dr. Anupama V, Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry, CDSIMER for her valuable inputs in writing the manuscript. I'd also like to thank my peers - Ms. Uppada Vibha and Ms. Likitha U for their thoughts and valuable inputs that I've missed while drafting the manuscript.

### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

***How to cite this article:*** Vishal, K.R. (2024). Unscrambling the Friendship Code: A Psychoanalytic Exploration of the Bollywood Film: “Dor”. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 12(2), 589-594. DIP:18.01.059.20241202, DOI:10.25215/1202.059